EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO ADULT LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIAN CLASSROOM: CULTURAL ISSUES

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Abstract

In recent years the Australian federal government has seen Australian universities as entities that can serve the international market for Japanese language competency. However, the resulting multiculturalism in the classroom could be a hidden obstacle to the effective teaching of a foreign language to adults. The importance of this issue is also emphasized by the need for foreign language teachers to address their role as one of intercultural language teaching. What teaching strategies are most effective for teaching different L1 groups?

Members of three different L1 groups, Chinese, Korean and English were tested on their Japanese writing skills after a 14-week course on expository writing in Japanese. This was part of their third year Japanese Language course.

The Chinese Group excelled in Kango writing skills, but found the use of traditional Japanese Ki Shoo Ten Ketsu text structures difficult. The Korean Group coped well with the syllabary based Yamatokotaba but the incidental observation was made that it found the Ki Shoo Ten Ketsu text structure and the sudden topic change

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in the Ten section of the text type difficult. Like the Koreans, Kango writing skills also challenged the English group. Members of the English group also did not score well on the use of repetition to promote thematic continuity.

The results of the research support the intercultural language teaching approach. A number of strategies are suggested to address the needs of student's specific foreign language and culture.

Introduction

Teachers recognize that while some students in a class might respond well to one set of teaching strategies, other students will respond better to different approaches. So they try to tailor their course presentation to include a number of different strategies to address the needs of all of their students. Within the Australian context, the representation of different first language (L1) groups may vary enormously, depending on whether one is considering the general population, particular cities or specific classrooms. Does this mean that different teaching strategies are required to address these?

Let me first outline something of the Australian context for teaching Japanese as a second language. 41 Australian universities teach Japanese in all states and territories except the Northern Territory (which has the smallest population). (Fig. 1) In 1999 a total of 7,483 university students enrolled in Japanese courses, in Australian universities and 251 teachers taught them. (Figs 2 and 3) However, most students in Australia learn Japanese in primary and secondary schools where the majority of teachers are also found. (Fig. 4) The Australian population has become increasingly multicultural over the past thirty years, but its affects in the Australian classroom vary according to geographical location and educational institution.

The 2001 national census showed that in Sydney, the city in which I live, about 35% of the community speak in their home a language other than English. Nationally, the proportion of the population that does this is some 20%.

Public policy has evolved significantly within the last thirty years. Joseph Lo Bianco reports that Australian public policy has become "more restrictive", that is, government, in responding to the influence of constituency politics, language professionals and commercial imperatives, has narrowed its focus from the support of a pluralistic-based approach. (Lo Bianco, 2001). Perhaps this political trend reflects a popular reaction to the complexity of multicultural interfaces. At the same

time in the language-teaching domain, the integration of the cultural context with the language learning process has been increasingly recognised and promoted (Lo Bianco, 2000).

There is a significant international market for Japanese language competency. The Australian federal government sees Australian universities as entities that can serve this market and receive a significant return for their endeavour. They are all pressed by government to attract as many fee paying overseas students as possible. Sydney University, where I teach, is one of the more successful universities in attracting these students. However, the multiculturalism of these international classrooms could be a hidden obstacle to the effective teaching of a foreign language (L2) to adults. Knowing a student's first language (L1) and the cultural relationship of his or her L1 language community to that of the L2 may make a big difference in the choice of a teaching method for that student. S. P. Corder (1974) states "errors in the L2 text of subjects were the result of interference in the learning of the second language from the habits of the first language". Interference is defined by U.Weinreich as "…those instances of deviation from the norms of either language that occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language". E. Haugen defines linguistic borrowing as "an example of cultural diffusion, the spread of an item of culture from people to people".

In this paper, I will outline some of the differences in learning needs that my research has identified amongst different L1 groups in the Australian classroom, and, some tools that the teacher of Japanese as a foreign language can use to address these different needs. My particular concern for this paper is the teaching of Japanese writing skills. This is part of a project I have been engaged in over the last few years examining the influence of the student's first language on the learning of Japanese in the multicultural classroom. In earlier studies I have examined the role of the student's first language on the acquisition of Japanese reading competence, honorifics (politeness) and orthography.

Wilga M. Rivers has written in 1968 that teachers of a second language cannot expect their students to write fluently, in a manner that is comparable to native speakers of that language. She suggested that for many students, writing exercises in language functions as a vehicle for language drills, not as a means by which the student will gain competence in writing fluently in the L2. (Wilga M. Rivers, Teaching foreign-language skills, University of Chicago, 1968).

The core of the problem identified by Wilga M. Rivers is that the work of "second language" teachers is not just confined to teaching language competencies. Indeed, in current

literature, the distinction is made between "second" language teaching, which involves a second language used in the same culture (for example, English as used in many African and Asian Countries) and "foreign" language teaching where the "foreign" language taught plays no major role in the community and is primarily taught in the classroom (Rod Ellis, The Study of Second Language Acquisition (Oxford University Press, 1994, pages 2-3).

Crozet and Liddicoat call the process in Australia "Intercultural Language Teaching" (ILT) in recognition of the necessity to understand communication between non-native speakers (the language learners) and native speakers as intercultural communication rather than communication in the target language. (Chantal Crozet & Anthony J. Liddicoat "The Challenge of Intercultural Language Teaching: Engaging with Culture in the Classroom", in Bianco et al Striving for the Third Place, Language Australia, 1999). To be successful at their task, teachers must also teach their students intercultural competencies (Lo Bianco and Crozet, 2003). As "Intercultural Language Teachers", teachers of a foreign language need to understand "not only the connections between culture and language", but also "how the notions of language understanding and language knowledge interact with behaviour in that language" (Lo Bianco and Crozet, 2003, page 7).

Learning to write competently in a foreign language, for example Japanese, and teaching others to write fluently, is not a hopeless task, as many teachers would confirm. However, as David Newman states, "the relationship between instruction and learning is extremely complex. It is not a linear relationship, and there is no one-to one relationship between teaching and learning" (Rod Ellis, The Study of Second Language Acquisition, Oxford, 1996).

However, the challenge to the teacher to address intercultural issues increases radically as students progress from the beginners level (for example, first year) to senior years (for example, third year). Whereas the first year student is restricted to guided, controlled and structured exercises, the third year student is exposed to more open-ended exercises and requirements for "free expression". It is here that the student's writing is required their sensitivity to the contexts of culture and situation.

The aim of this study is to use contrastive rhetorical techniques to clarify some of the factors involved in learning Japanese writing (as a foreign language) so that teachers may design more effective teaching plans for particular students. Writing text that is acceptable to the educated reader involves more than writing a number of well-formed sentences. Our readers, whatever the language, expect writing

to be organised and our thoughts to be set out in cohesive units. Senko K. Maynard calls this semantically connected unit of linguistic expression a 'discourse'. The Japanese term for this is *bunshoo*. When students learn to write effectively in Japanese, they must learn what we call *bunshooron* - devices to provide semantic connectivity in their texts. Other languages such as English, from the point of view of contrastive rhetoric, employ similar devices to provide semantic connectivity in their texts. Typical devices used in English include conjunction, repetition, substitution and topic continuity. The forms these take in Japanese are not necessarily the same as English. (Senko K. Maynard, 1998) The devices are not to be assumed to be the same from one language to the next.

Method

The experimental subjects for this preliminary study were 41 students in my semester course at the University of Sydney, assigned to one of three groups according to their first language: 'Chinese' (19), 'English' (13) and 'Korean' (8). To be classified as a Chinese or Korean L1 speaker, a student shall also not be born in Australia or have received primary education in an English speaking country. As a result of this selection process, the results presented here represent a sample of the full groups attending the class (totalling about 80).

In order to track their writing progress, the students were all given an expository writing task, that is, a short essay, on the first, seventh and fourteenth week of the semester. A different topic was given at each stage of the course. For the second and third stages, they were asked to write in the traditional Japanese form, *ki shoo-ten-ketsu*.

The topic for week 1 was 'My summer holiday', the topic for week 7 was ' My view on different culture and customs' and the topic for week 14 was 'My favourite book or my favourite movie'. When the students were given the first task on week 1 they had received no instruction about writing techniques from my course. By the time they had received the second writing task on week 7, they had received some instruction about writing techniques such as connection devices, text organisation, paragraph development, etc. The final writing task was given at the end of the semester when the students had received the full course about techniques for writing in Japanese.

Five adult Japanese native speakers resident in Australia were used as a control or reference group. Since these people are teachers of Japanese language, and familiar with the classical forms of writing, they were perhaps not typical of average native speakers and

they functioned as an ideal or reference group.

Data Analysis

The test data analysed were the student's written essays written at the beginning of the course (week 1) and at the end (week 14). Each essay was analysed in terms of a number of indicators of text cohesion operating at the word, sentence and paragraph level. At this stage of the project, the sample sizes are still quite small so I have isolated trends by graphing the means of the scores. I will report each finding as I describe what each indicator of Japanese writing competence means and how it was evaluated.

1. Which indicators showed divergence between the L1 groups?

1.1 Number of *kango*

In Japanese language, *kango* are words historically derived from Chinese words. Essentially, these are logographs or ideographs, characters representing words or units of meaning in contrast to phonographs, which represent sounds. In addition *kango* are contrasted with the historically 'native' vocabulary called *yamatokotoba* (or *wago*) (Senko K. Maynard, 1998). The latter consists of a string of consonant plus vowel syllables, which are written in *hiragana* or *kanji-hiragana* combinations (*hiragana* are phonographs in a syllabary of consonant/vowel sounds. *Kango* appears mostly in two-character compounds and falls into the grammatical category of noun. *Kango* vocabulary is larger than *yamatokotoba*, and its relatively precise and analytical quality makes it a suitable means for expressing abstract thought. *Yamatokotoba* is more appropriately used to express emotion and feelings. For this exercise *kango* is an indicator of use of an educated, logically connected vocabulary. (Senko K. Maynard, 1998)

The Chinese students used more than twice as many *kango* as the Korean or English L1 students. (Fig. 5) The influence of the Chinese L1, through the use of common *kango* characters in Japanese *kanji*, and in written Chinese, is clear. This contrasts with both written English, which is based on an alphabet, and written Korean (*Han-gul*), which is based on a syllabary. (The number of *kango* employed by the Japanese reference group illustrates the high frequency of *kango* characters in formal 'educated' Japanese writing.

1.2 "Conformity with the *ki shoo ten ketsu* writing model".

The ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** model is a text structure for organising paragraph development. It is regarded as a traditional form in Japanese expository writing (typically found in essays,

newspaper articles, compositions, etc, but not letters or narratives). It has a four-part structure and is characteristically Japanese in that there is not a text structure in English writing that corresponds directly to it.

Ki - A presentation of the topic at the beginning to inform the reader what the passage is about.

For example, "Many Japanese travel overseas recently",
Ooku no nihon-jin ga kaigai ryokoo o suru yoo ni natta

Shoo-This section immediately follows *ki*, and is a further development of the topic.

For example, "The survey of National comparisons show, Japanese have the time and money to travel",
Kokusai hikaku choosa ni yoru to nihon-jin wa jikan to okane ni yutori ga aru to iu koto de aru

Ten-This section introduces a surprising change or transformation of the topic to develop interest.

For example, "After World War II the Japanese were called 'economic animals' or 'working bees' and many books were written on this national trait",
Sengo wa nihon-jin wa 'Ekonomikku animaru' toka' Hataraki bachi' to iwareru yoo ni natta. Nihon moshiku wa nihon-jin ni kansuru ooku no hon mo kakareru yoo ni natta

Ketsu- This section puts all the elements together and brings the passage to a conclusion.

For example, "The reason why many Japanese travel now is not just because they have time and money, but because their attitude and consciousness to life style has changed."
Bootoo ni nobeta yoo ni Nihon-jin ga kaigai ryokoo o suru riyuu to ieba, jikan to okane ga arubakari dewa naku seikatsu e no ishiki to kangae ga kawatta kara de aru

The student's texts were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale in terms of their conformity with the ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** form. The ratings for each point on the scale were derived from the nine-point "Academic writing scale" used in Brendan J. Carroll, Testing Communicative Performance, Paragon, 1980, page 136, that is:

Ki ShooTen Ketsu Rating Scale of Paragraph Organization.

BAND SCALE SCORE		ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
"None"	1	Lacks structure, coherence. Frequent basic lexical and grammatical errors.
"Not very good"	2	Presentation has appearance of coherence but makes frequent lexical and grammatical errors and uses restricted range of skills.
"Good"	3	Slight limitation on style, but uses basic information competently.
"Very good"	4	Good structure. Uses a wide range of vocabulary and expression to convey ideas. Use of lexis, grammatical patterns reasonably accurate.
Excellent	5	Expert writer. Writes with authority, accuracy and style (***ki shoo ten ketsu***)

The 'Chinese' L1 students had difficulty conforming to the ***ki shoo ten***

ketsu form compared with 'English' or 'Korean' writers. (Fig. 6) This is because Chinese L1 students tended to use their existing knowledge of *kango* or to rely on repetition to maintain semantic coherence in their text rather than use new forms of text organisation.

The passages by the Korean group were very similar in this respect to those of the English group. The form of the Japanese text is important in writing because it gives the text topic continuity and coherence.

1.3 Number of Particles.

Japanese particles are non-conjugative words that attach to words, phrases or clauses, and indicate the relationship of preceding words to the following word or to the rest of the sentences. Some Japanese particles have functions similar to English equivalents. Other Japanese particles have functions somewhat similar to English prepositions, but differ in that the Japanese particles are post-positional rather than pre-positional.

In Japanese prose, particles are important for maintaining semantic continuity. The meaning of a sentence often depends on a single particle.

Example: *Tanaka san* **o** *matte imasu*
(I am waiting for Mr. Tanaka)

Tanaka san **ga** *matte imasu*
(Mr. Tanaka is waiting for me)

Unfortunately, if students have received a poor grounding in the use of particles in their first year they are at a real disadvantage in third year. Since they are unable to use simple sentences to convey meaning they are at a loss when coping with compound or embedded sentences.

1.4. Repetition.

The Chinese and Korean L1 groups frequently repeated words in their text, while initially the English L1 group hardly used this at all. However, by the end of the 14- week course, the English L1 group was rapidly catching up with the others. It should be noted, though, that where the Chinese and Korean students used repetition for topic continuity, the English students tended to use repetition for emphasis (Fig. 7)

For example, Chinese students frequently used the same character in all parts of a ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** structure to maintain continuity. English students would often repeat thematic words in the last, *ketsu*, section when they wished to bring all the elements of their composition together at the conclusion.

2. Which indicators did not show significant divergence?

2.1 Conjunctions.

A conjunction is a word used to connect sentences, words, phrases or clauses. They can have an important role in maintaining semantic continuity in a text. In Japanese there are two kinds of conjunctions: sentence-beginning conjunctions and conjunctions between words, phrases or clauses. An unexpected outcome of examining this matter was the finding that the Japanese reference group did not use any of the overt conjunctions in their writing. Instead, they used more subtle and hidden devices to provide continuity.

The reason for this is not that the overt use of conjunctions in writing is grammatically incorrect. It illustrates instead an important cultural factor: the Japanese "way of thinking". The impact of mores and ways of thinking in different cultures on expressive behaviour has been long recognised and articulated by writers such as Robert Kaplan. In the case of Japanese natives, the absence of conjunctions in their written speech reflects a cultural disposition to prefer more indirect and sophisticated means to convey the meaning required.
So instead of saying:

Haru ga moo sugu kuru shikashi mada samui desu
Spring is near at hand, but it is still cold
(In this sentence "*shikashi*" is used as a conjunction meaning 'but')

Japanese prefer to write:

Harumajika, mada samushi
Spring is near at hand but it is still cold
(In this sentence ellipsis is used to eliminate the conjunction. '*majika*' means near at hand and '*samushi*' is a classical form of '*samui*')

2.2 Sentence Beginning Conjunctions.

Many of these are a combination of two or more words.

For example, *Tokoro de* . . . meaning, by the way, or *Sate* . . ., meaning well then.

Sometimes it is not easy to recognise these are used as conjunctions indicating that the speaker is changing the topic.

3. Indicators showing similar effects

3.1 Number of correct compound sentences.

The performances of each of the student groups converged after 14 weeks.

3.2. Number of Verbs.

I expected the number of verbs to provide a sensitive indicator of success in writing Japanese sentences. The verb has paramount importance in Japanese writing, because the subject is often omitted from the sentence. Also, the

Japanese verb is sometimes more specific in describing the action that it represents than the English verb. In Japanese, one may use several different verbs for a certain action for which only one verb can be used in English. For example, in English we use the same verb, 'wear' to describe three different behaviours. We can say I wear it, when we mean:

1. 'I wear a dress',
2. 'I wear a hat',
3. 'I wear a pair of shoes'.

In Japanese, I would use different verbs in each of the sentences:

1. kiru,
2. kaburu,
3. haku .

In Japanese one uses a different verb depending on the part of body the item of clothing covers.

Similarly, the English verb, 'play' has more than a half dozen counterparts in Japanese. In Japanese, one would use different verbs to take the function of 'play' in sentences such as: I play the piano, I play the drum, I play the flute, I play a record, I play tennis.

Conclusion

The different L1 groups differed strongly in two ways:

- Chinese L1 groups tend to be strong with their use of *kango* or Chinese characters. This strength however, leads to a tendency for the Chinese students to use Chinese characters to promote thematic coherence and cohesion in the text. This further leads to the stylistic fault of overuse of the same character.

- Chinese L1 groups tend to be poor in their use of the ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** model of text structure. For promoting topic continuity, they rely more on repetition and use of *kango*.

The significance of these differences is that they fall in line with major cultural differences between the Chinese L1 groups and the others and indicate fundamentally different approaches that the Intercultural Language Teacher (ILT) should take in plans for teaching members of the different groups.

How is the teacher to take these factors into account, so that their students are guided to acquiring native-like fluency in writing?

1. The teacher must be alert to the different ways a first language and culture can distort their student's Japanese writing competencies. For example, students with a Chinese language and culture background are likely to be familiar with *kanji* (but beware of confusion from negative transfer from Chinese

characters to similar looking Japanese *kanji* characters. On the other hand these students are likely to need extra help to use non repetitive devices to maintain text continuity in paragraph development.

Students with a Korean language and culture background are more likely to be familiar with syllabary-based *yamatokotoba* and with the grammatical structures used in Japanese sentences. However they cannot be expected to share the Japanese "way of thinking" and their preference to eschew certain direct devices, such as sentence joining conjunctions, and prefer more indirect devices.

2. The teacher should make their students aware of the significant contrasts between their first language and the Japanese language and culture. The teacher should suggest strategies to each individual on how to address these contrasts, and then, monitor the student's writing for the application of this awareness, and the implementation of these strategies.

   For example, with English L1 students the teacher should take time to explain how native Japanese writers employ the use of repetition to promote thematic continuity. English L1 students will benefit most from exercises applying this in the use of *kango.*

   With Korean L1 students, the teacher should also spend time with exercises in the use of *kango*, and promote the use of devices other than repetition, for example, study of conjunctions to provide semantic continuity. And encourage practice of the ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** text structure.

   Although this was not tested in my study, I have noticed that students with a Korean language and culture background have great trouble with the *ten* section of the ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** structure, that is, in making a sudden topic change in their composition. This is an area where these students need a lot of practice.

   In contrast, Chinese L1 students would benefit from exercises in the use of text structures, such as ***ki shoo ten ketsu*** as a device, other than repetition, to provide semantic continuity.

These targeted approaches, based upon findings from a planned methodology, could perhaps be seen as an additional load to add to already heavy teaching schedules. It should however be seen as further useful tool for assisting students to achieve the goal of effective, idiomatic, culture sensitive writing in Japanese.

Figures

Fig. 1

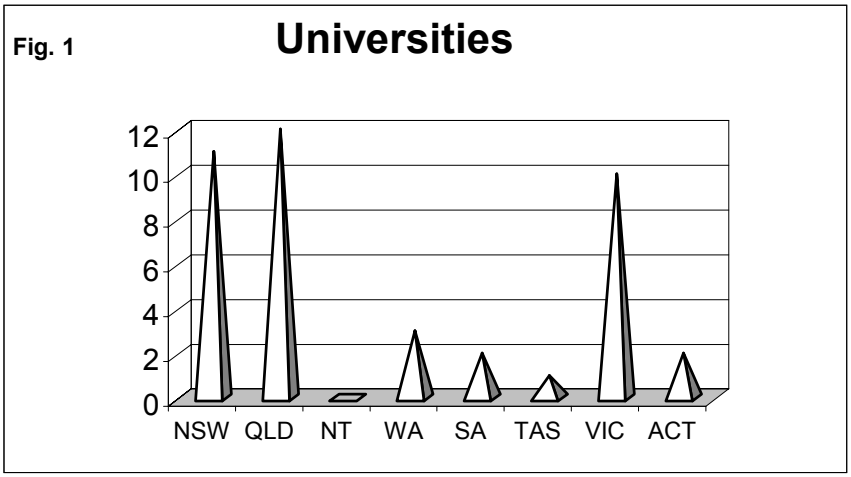


Fig. 2

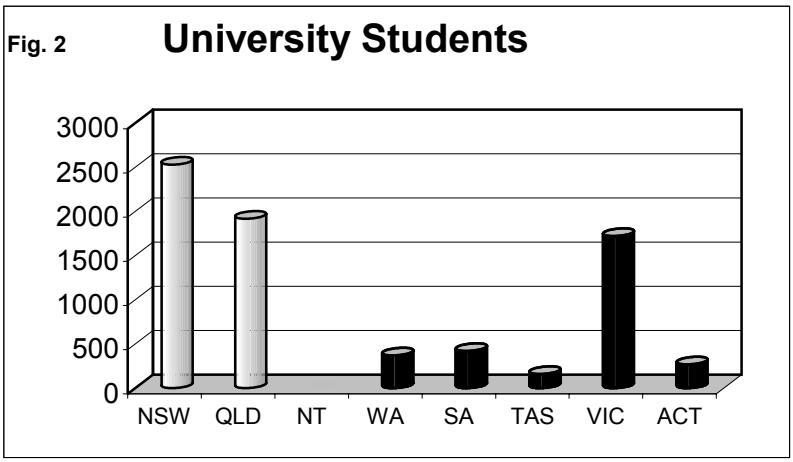
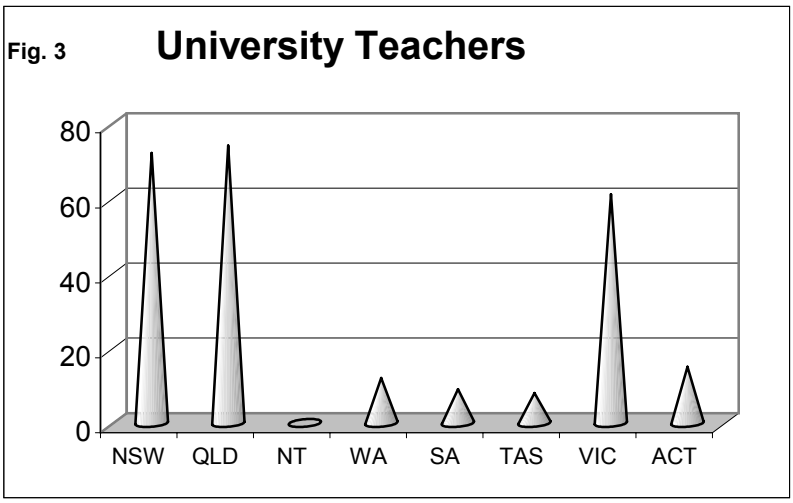


Fig. 3



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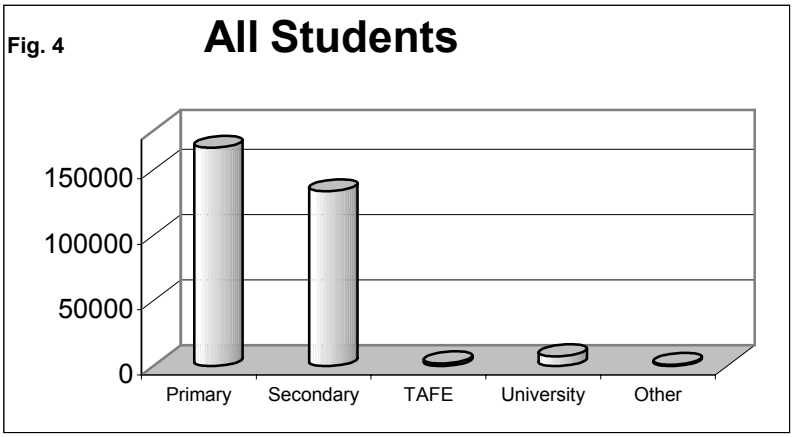


Fig. 5

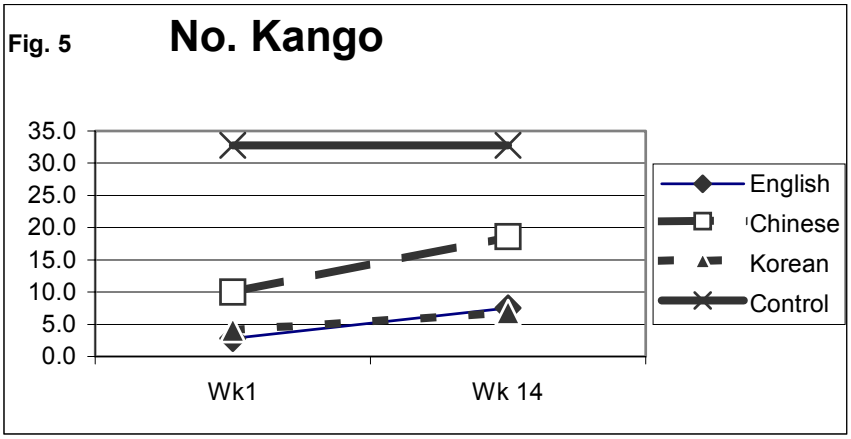
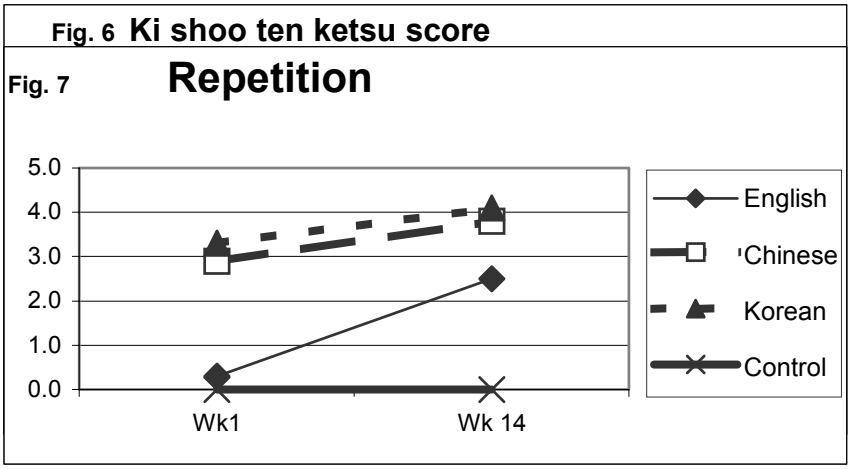


Fig. 6 Ki shoo ten ketsu score

Fig. 7



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